

TRACK's First Year Deemed Successful as Plans to Expand Move Forward

The Tech Ready Apprentices for Careers in Kentucky (TRACK) program finished its pilot year with all of the student participants moving into fulltime apprenticeships with their industry partners.

Office of Career and Technical Education (OCTE) Business and Industry Specialist Mary Taylor created the program and said while numbers are small, a 100 percent success rate is indicative of the potential that exists within the program.

“As with any new program, the first year is a learning process as it was for TRACK. But to have all of our students who enrolled in the program advance into the fulltime apprenticeships is a sign of things to come as we expand for the coming school year,” Taylor said.

Advanced manufacturing was the only program area in which students participated during the pilot phase. The 2014-15 year will include the construction trades as well, and plans to expand beyond that are in the works, according to Taylor.

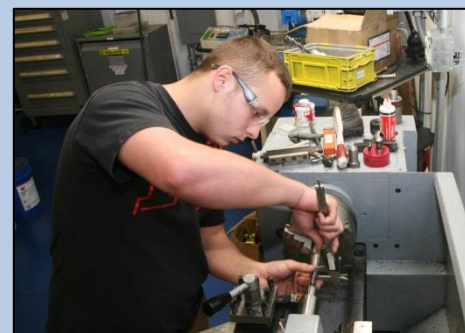
“I think the success of TRACK in its first year speaks well to a couple of points; one being the quality of instruction students are receiving in their secondary programs and the other is the quality of the students themselves,” said Taylor. “Employers are looking for employees with good people skills in addition to their workplace abilities and these students have shown they possess both.”

Chase Coffey is one of the first-year TRACK students who enrolled in the machine tool technology program at Green County Area Technology Center (ATC) and entered the pre-apprenticeship program working at Murakami Manufacturing, U.S.A. Inc.

Having learned the necessary skills at the high school level made him an ideal candidate to enter the pre-apprenticeship program. Upon completion of his senior year, and after participating in TRACK, Coffey will continue his work at Murakami as an employee in their apprenticeship program.

“My guidance counselor recommended the machine tool program to me and I have loved it” he said. “I think beginning this career at the high school level opened up more opportunities for me.”

Coffey said that having also taken welding courses in high school helped in his TRACK experience. After working through the summer, his next step will be to further his education at the Elizabethtown Community and Technical College, Springfield campus.



Chase Coffey, a machine tool technology student is one of the first-year TRACK participants. Murakami Manufacturing, U.S.A. Inc, has recently hired him as part of the company's apprenticeship program. As part of his training, Coffey will continue his studies at the Elizabethtown Community and Technical College, Springfield campus.

Brian Baily is the assistant principal at HCHS and head of the school's CTE unit. He said in the past there has been a set of courses a student would progress through in a chosen career pathway but TRACK has allow more flexibility in adapting to changes needed by employers.

"One of the things we have been looking at is how to use our existing resources to meet those needs and meet our students' needs," he said. "The fact that the TRACK program culminates in a certificate that's recognized for college- and career-readiness, will go a long way in raising those percentages but I think the work-based learning component is also going to broaden the student's recognition of the fact that employers expect people to achieve at a certain level and think critically."

Baily pointed out that the support from the district and the local community for the CTE programs within the school has been great through the years and remains strong.

Angie Miller, the plant administration manager at Murakami said there are a lot of opportunities at the company especially for young adults from the ATC.

"Hopefully we can take these students to the next level," she said. "From what I have seen of the TRACK program so far, catching these young people at this level who have a skill in mind gets it engrained in them so they can keep moving forward."

Miller added that she would like to continue with TRACK and looks forward to bringing more students on board with the company. She pointed out that there are a lot of people with degrees coming into the workforce but not so many with the needed skills. Those that do have those skills can make a good salary and have a good career ahead of them, she said.

Barry Porter was Coffey's machine tool technology teacher at the Green County ATC. He said with the help of companies like Murakami, he is starting to see manufacturing jobs make a comeback in the state.

"This is sparking an interest with the students and they can actually see it's something they can accomplish and can make a good living through the machine tool program," he said.

Porter added that many of his students take other classes at the ATC which gives them an edge in the workforce, having multiple skills. He also said that teaching employability skills within those ATC programs has also made a difference for the students.

"With the TRACK program, we are already looking at students for next year and we want to send the best," he said. "We already have students wanting to know how they can get into this program."

Dr. Linda Floyd, Green County ATC principal said after participating in the TRACK program for the first year, she sees opportunities for it to grow.

"We're already talking about TRACK with the business programs because we have other teachers interested in being a part of it," she said. "We wanted to make sure we were going to be successful with it in our first year and fortunately we had a good partner to work with in Murakami. It was a team approach."

Floyd added that having business and industry partners at the secondary level is critical to the existence of Career and Technical Education (CTE) programs and it provides the chance to show the caliber of students coming from the secondary level.

While a student at Henderson County High School (HCHS), Cody Burke enrolled in that school's Career and Technical Education Center's machine tool

technology program. Stuart Jones, machine tool technology teacher at Henderson County, thought Burke would be a good choice to participate in the TRACK pre-apprenticeship program because of his quality machine tool skills and his good work ethic.

"The kind of work ethic he has is sometimes rare these days and Cody is one of those students who gets things done in an appropriate time frame and always wants something to do; that's a good combination," he said.

Burke began participating with the school's TRACK industry partner, Gibbs Die-Casting. Now, after a successful year and graduation, he will continue as an employee with the company in its apprenticeship program.

As part of his continued apprenticeship, Burke will have the opportunity to attend college this fall; something he is looking forward to.

"I wasn't sure I was going to get there but this program gets my foot in the door with pay and benefits while going to college, and no student loan debt," he said.

Victor Doty is the Henderson County CTE director and a product of an apprenticeship himself. He said in addition to working the TRACK program, they have worked with local business and industry to try and get past some of the barriers of working with high school students such as age.

"The barriers are the businesses that are setting policy that you don't hire a 17 year old but they are overcoming that down here," he said.

In fact, the entire state is now covered by an agreement between the Kentucky Department of Education and global human resource agency Adecco.



Pictured from left: Barry Porter, machine tool technology teacher at Green County ATC, Chase Coffey and Angie Miller, plant administration manager at Murakami.

That company has paved the way for Kentucky high school students to gain valuable work experience through cooperative education opportunities and pre-apprenticeship programs.

The Kentucky Youth Employment Solution (YES) agreement will allow students to be more involved in their co-op experience while alleviating some major

legal issues for business and industry partners that have hindered co-op programs in the past.

The agreement covers any co-op student anywhere in the state, something that will allow schools like HCHS to move forward on TRACK and other co-op programs.

Doty added that the difference he sees in apprenticeships now verses those from several years ago is that course offerings match up with business and industry needs, something that will, over time, help keep students and those businesses close to home.

“The whole idea is to help hold these students in their own communities and I think this is going to be a win-win situation,” he said. “It may take five years to see the fruits of it but we’ve seen a little bit of that already with these young people coming out of here and going into apprenticeships.”

Doty emphasized that the mindset is already changing. Guidance counselors are now seeing this as the other four-year option for students and part of the change of the accountability system now in place in Kentucky.

“This is a whole package and I think it’s going to have a great impact and I think it will be for the nation and not just Kentucky. People from other states are already contacting us about these programs,” he said. “I could retire any day now but these types of things are making it more exciting and making it easier for me to stay a little longer to see these things through.”

These positive relationships are part of the foundation of TRACK, said Taylor.

“It really takes a buy-in from the local workforce community to make this work. We see success not only with the TRACK program but all things connected to CTE,” she said.



“The pre-apprenticeship gives the employer the opportunity to see our students in action as well as help mold them into the employee that they need all the while giving the students training hours toward their apprenticeship. We would love to expand our pre-apprenticeship program to other areas of manufacturing to include welding as well as increase the number of employers involved in the current program.”

**Tom Thompson, principal
Breckinridge County ATC**

In addition to their current business partner, Thompson added that there are three others companies that have agreed to participate for the coming year. He also pointed out that the program would not have been as successful if it were not for the hard work of Taylor and Mike Donta, deputy commissioner with the Labor Cabinet. They have been the driving force and marketing agents of this program and they deserve the recognition, he said.

Tom Thompson, principal at Breckinridge County ATC has also seen that type of support. The school’s machine tool technology program has been recognized for years as one of the top industrial-related programs in the state; so much so that their programs were already in line with local business and industry needs.

“We were already doing most of what needed to be done to implement the program,” he said. “The program is designed to let the employer choose the core classes they want their future apprentices to take but all of our partner businesses asked that we simply use the courses that our students had been taking, thus allowing us to make few changes to our curriculum.”

In beginning this type of hands-on education at the secondary level is extremely important to get apprenticeships started as a motivational tool for those interested in their chosen field, Thompson said.

“Students earning the opportunity to enter our pre-apprenticeship program see the value of the school work as it ties directly to what they are doing on the job,” he said. “Employers have a chance to help directly influence the instruction relating to real world application. This is a powerful tool in the process of creating an environment and culture focused on learning with purpose.”

Thompson had five students involved in the TRACK program this year; more than any of the other pilot schools.

“The students have reacted very positively to the program. They have been excited to know that what they are doing before graduation will count toward their apprenticeship goals after school,” he said. “This fact seems to be a motivational tool for the employer and our teachers.”

Breckinridge County ATC’s business partner Whitworth Tool, Inc. has been a longtime supporter of the school and has hired many former students in the past. Thompson said that partnership has been good for both students and the employer.